



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
National Elk Refuge

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## **NATIONAL ELK REFUGE MANAGERS EVALUATE CONDITIONS TO DETERMINE START OF SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING**

National Elk Refuge wildlife managers are continuing to closely monitor snow conditions, elk numbers and distribution, and forage conditions to determine the initiation of supplemental feeding on the Refuge this winter. Supplemental feeding is a management practice which enables the National Elk Refuge to maintain a larger number of elk than the winter range would otherwise sustain.

Severe winter weather and storms focus much attention on the feeding of wintering wildlife. Though many parts of the valley have seen significant snow accumulations this month, the National Elk Refuge remains drier than many other parts of the Jackson Hole valley. Snow depths average 6.6 inches on the south end of the Refuge, with a snow water equivalent of 1.7 inches. Snow water equivalent is a common snowpack measurement that indicates the amount of moisture in the snow. Managers will reassess conditions in the next few days.

Refuge managers begin regular surveys of conditions in December to determine the need for supplemental feeding. Sampling focuses on forage availability and utilization by the herd as well as snow depths and consistency. When conditions make it difficult for the elk to obtain natural forage, the feeding program is initiated. Supplemental feeding usually starts in late January on the years it is provided but can vary depending on conditions and the number of elk on the Refuge. During an average winter, approximately 60% of the food requirements of the wintering elk herd are met by standing forage and 40% by supplemental feed. The elk are fed alfalfa pellets an average of 75 days.

An estimated 4,900 elk are currently on the Refuge, nearing the largest number seen so far this season. Numbers peaked in early December with approximately 5,000 elk, then dropped to an average of 3,400 elk for the remainder of the month. In January, the number of elk on the Refuge has averaged 4,800.

Because recent snowfall has pushed wildlife to lower elevations, travelers should use caution, particularly at night, to avoid deer, elk, and moose on roadways.

—FWS—

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